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ABSTRACT

"Westhills" is a multiethnic coastal community in San Diego County, California, in which Mexican Americans comprise approximately 22 percent of the population. This book reports ethnographic research on a group of working-class Chicana adolescents in one Westhills barrio and their problems, school experiences, immersion in two conflicting cultures, and involvement with gangs. Chapters focus on the influence of cultural context on teen behaviors, research setting and methodology, seven girls featured in the book, sex role and family patterns in the barrio, peer culture and patterns of behavior, sex and love, schooling, gangs, and one specific girls' gang. The chapter on schooling describes conditions at the barrio's overcrowded and underfunded high school, including high dropout and poverty rates, teacher burnout and discouragement, social promotion that results in few graduates with the course requirements for college, tracking and de facto segregation, sexism and racism on campus, classroom interactions, student aspirations, and student resistance to school as part of White culture. The conclusion refutes the culture of poverty model and suggests that behavioral choices such as early pregnancy, gang affiliation, and dropping out of school, which look like social deviance or poor judgment to the outsider, make sense in an environment that offers few options to young women. (Contains over 300 references and an index.) (SV)

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